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## THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN PARIS.

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THE religious situation in Paris, and in France generally, is now more disturbed than it has been for twenty-five years, and as it is much affected by political questions, it is not easy to discover the truth, and to discern which is right among the conflicting parties. We will try nevertheless to draw a sketch of it, as impartial and accurate as possible.

The Roman Catholics cry that they are persecuted, deprived of their goods and their rights; that their clergymen are treated as rebels and their monks and nuns as outlaws. The Radical Socialists, on the other hand, complain of the presumption of the Roman Catholic priests and of their encroachments in secular matters, and are resolved to champion the supremacy of the civil power over the clergy. Such was the background of the Association Act of 1901 (*Loi Waldeck-Rousseau*), which, although granting more liberty for secular associations, greatly restrained the religious, and especially the monastic, congregations. The present struggle is but an episode of the conflict between the clerical and civil powers which has lasted for centuries. It will be enough, for our purpose, to point out the latest and most efficient causes of the anti-clerical movement.

<sup>1</sup>At the request of the author his name is withheld. [THE EDITORS.]

The strongest is the unquestionable tendency of most of the monastic orders to fight against our political organization. The orders, through their preachers and teachers, instruct the people that subordination of the clergy to the civil power, civil marriage, divorce, and liberty of non-Catholic worship are contrary to the constitution of the Roman Catholic church, as founded on a divine law, and, therefore, that these institutions may be tolerated as lesser evils, but cannot be recognized as permanent, and consequently ought to be fought by all means. On the other hand, an increasing group of the Socialist party, the so-called *Libertaires*, supported by the great majority of the Freemasons and by many scientific men, are openly hostile to every religion, which they denounce as standing in the way of social and scientific progress. At last, the open or secret participation of some congregations and of many bishops in several recent political matters—for instance, in the Dreyfus case and in the parliamentary elections of April, 1902—roused in the whole Republican party an outcry of indignation and a resolution to render a repetition of the interference impossible.

Such was the situation on June 7, 1902, when Senator Combes took the reins of government from the tired hands of Waldeck-Rousseau. The declaration of the premier, in his opening address before the Chamber of Deputies, did not leave the least doubt concerning the catastrophe which was impending over the Catholic party:

A part of the clergy would confuse the cause of the Roman Catholic church with the cause of the religious congregations. Contrary to the spirit of the law, these clergymen have come down into the field of battle of the parliamentary elections. Such misconduct is intolerable. We will examine with you if the means of action which the government possesses are sufficient to prevent the recurrence of such an abuse. The Association Act has entered upon its period of judicial application. The cabinet will see that none of its clauses are checked.

And these words were not idle threats. During the past year the cabinet of Émile Combes, supported by the majority of both houses, has suppressed the greater part of the preaching and teaching congregations, closed seven or eight hundred of their houses, repealed the Falloux Act on secondary education (March,

1850), kept back the salary of several bishops and vicars who had made protests against these measures, broken off the negotiations with the Holy See about the nomination to vacant bishoprics, and declared that, if the clerical power would not submit, it would not shrink from the repeal of the Concordat.

Let us now consider each of the parties separately.

1. *The anti-religious party.*—One cannot say that the entire government party is openly hostile to religion, but since up to now it has yielded in almost every case to the anti-religious movement and voted the aforesaid measures, we end with the same result. The cause is championed by the newspapers *La Raison*, *L'Action*, *La petite République*, etc., by the majority of the Freemasons, and by a good half of the members of the League for Human Rights. The leaders are François de Pressensé, deputy from Lyons; Lintilhac, deputy from the Cantal; G. A. Hubbard, deputy from Paris; Charbonnel and Guineaudau, formerly Roman Catholic priests. They aim at the destruction of every religion as favoring ignorance and superstition, and would build the temple of reason and science on the ruins of the churches. To this end, one of them, F. de Pressensé, has prepared an elaborate bill on the separation of church and state, which throws much light on the secret purpose of the party. This bill, consisting of 103 articles, disestablishes the four religious societies recognized by the state—Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Jewish, and, far from granting them full civil freedom, it deprives them of eighteen common rights at least. So that the application of such a bill, if voted and changed into an act, would be the ruin of all religious denominations.

Moreover, the love of symbols and of mysterious rites is so strong among our nation that, in order to destroy radically the Christian worship, they have invented ceremonies, which would replace the sacraments and feasts. Among the freethinkers there is a kind of initiation of children corresponding to baptism or first communion; two years ago, at the Trocadéro, a Feast of Reason, as a substitute for Whitsunday, was celebrated with great solemnity.

Their favorite topic is the radical reform of public education.

They are not satisfied with the exclusion of the Roman Catholic clergy from the primary and secondary schools; now they wish to make the moral education of all children fully agnostic. Here is the declaration of war against religious education made by Mr. Dantresme, general secretary of the Prefecture of Bouches du Rhône, in his address as chairman of the meeting for distribution of prizes at the Lycée of Marseilles (July 31):

It is necessary to draw all superstitious prejudices out of the mind of the younger generations. We want a system of education cleared from that Christian humility which lowers man by the besetting thought of sin, and renders him a quaking and credulous slave. The future will be ruled, not by faith, but by science, which makes the conscience free. So much the better, if the evolution of the human mind proceeds without religion.

And here is a specimen of their tolerance. Some weeks ago *La Raison* and *L'Action* raised a strong protest against the customary procession of the Fête-Dieu (June 11), and succeeded in getting from several prefects the prohibition of it, under the pretense that it would obstruct the streets. And just now (August 2), with the permission of the government and the protection of all the force of the police, they have organized a kind of atheistic procession, passing before Étienne Dolet's statue in Paris. Could there be a more striking example of intolerance and partiality? In fact, the leaders of this anti-religious party do not deserve the title of freethinkers, since they do not admit freedom of thought for their adversaries. They are no less fanatical than the most exclusive Ultramontanes.

2. *The Ultramontane Catholic party.*—If, now, we consider the other great struggling party, the Roman Catholic—or, more exactly, Ultramontanes—we are, at first sight, struck by the similarity of their spirit and their actions to those of the anti-clerical party. After they have been defeated in the last electoral struggle, they are crying aloud, "Liberty—liberty of association, liberty of conscience!" and are protesting against persecution. But if one turns to the editors of their leading papers—Drumont, of *La libre Parole*; Cassagnac, of *L'Autorité*; and Desmoulins, of *Le Gaulois*—and observes their attitude, or that of *Les Croix*,<sup>2</sup> toward the Anti-Semitic movement in Algeria

<sup>2</sup> *Les Croix*, the official organ of the Roman Catholic bishops in Paris and in the departments.

or the Dreyfus case at Paris, it will then be impossible to take in earnest their advocacy of religious liberty. In fact, they advocate the confessional unity of France, the subordination of all secular institutions to the church, and the subjection of all other denominations to the control of the Roman Catholic authority. In 1877-78, under the so-called "Cabinet de l'ordre moral," when the Roman Catholics had a majority in Parliament, they did their utmost to put the nation under the yoke of the bishops and to get the support of public authority for the worst practices of the Roman Catholic faith, namely, the worship of the sacred heart of Jesus and the control by the bishops of all grades of public education. This fresh instance shows what use the Ultramontanes would make of their power, should they resume the reins of government.

From this character of the party one can realize to what state of mind they have been reduced by the enforcement of the Waldeck-Rousseau act and of the last acts of Parliament, the latter increasing even to injustice the clauses of the former. They are incensed by the abolition of most of the preaching and teaching orders; by the closure of a hundred chapels, the walls of which are still resounding with the eloquent voices of Fathers Didon, Coubé, or Ollivier; and by the suppression of so many schools and colleges where their children were taught their religion and their political principles. All these measures, voted by Parliament without serious preliminary discussion, or ordered by the minister of the interior, in many doubtful cases, without appealing to the courts of justice, have wounded the sense of right and even of legality, and have excited feelings of rancor and revenge, which at the first opportunity may burst out in bloody reprisal.

However, the long agony of Pope Leo XIII., by diverting the attention of the Roman Catholic party, has brought a kind of truce in this religious war. Although a great many of the Ultramontane and royalist groups could not forgive him for advising the Catholics of France to rally to the republican government, the mass of their people showed the most sincere and respectful sympathy for the august sufferer and joined in the solemn prayer

ordered by Cardinal Richard to be said before the holy sacrament, in every church and chapel of Paris.

This sympathy extended to the non-Catholic societies. It is noticeable that even a lodge of English Freemasons openly expressed its desire for the healing of Leo XIII., or, if that could not be, for a painless death. The editor of the Protestant monthly, *La Revue chrétienne*, said in his number of August:

We render full justice to the eminent qualities of that great pope, to the dignity of his life, to his conciliating spirit. However, the most serious mistake of his government was to allot to human politics, to diplomatic combinations, too large a space.

It was stated by the College of Cardinals, after the death of Leo XIII., that the letters of condolence sent by the schismatic or heretic sovereigns and the presidents of republics were more expressive and sympathetic than the addresses sent by the heads of Roman Catholic nations, as Austria, Spain, and Italy. The Ultramontane party openly expressed its wishes for the election of an uncompromising, strongly conservative pope; and, strange to say, this wish was supported by the ultra-radical party in France, which hoped that the increasing struggle might end in the rupture of the Concordat. Both these extreme parties have been disappointed, and from all we know about Sarto's personal character, we may infer that Pius X. will continue Leo XIII.'s conciliatory policy toward the French government.

3. *The Liberal party.*—Between the Ultramontane Catholics and the anti-religious Freethinkers there is a middle party which, in my opinion, deserves the title of Liberal Republican, since it champions the maintenance of the great principles of the French Revolution: liberty of worship and equality of all citizens before the law. This party, represented by the newspapers *Les Débats*, *Le Temps*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Siècle*, and by the *Revue des deux Mondes*, consists of men of every denomination: Roman Catholics, like Georges Picot, Ribot, and Anatole Leroy Beaulieu; Protestants, like Gabriel Monod and A. Lods; agnostics, like De Lanessan and Waldeck-Rousseau; and even Jews, like Henry Michel and Théodore Reinach. All these men, although decidedly anti-clerical, have protested against the anti-monastic acts voted by

the present Parliament, or at least against the arbitrary and rough power used by Senator Combes to enforce them.

M. Georges Picot, the eminent author of the *Histoire des États généraux en France* and general Secretary of our Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, has eloquently shown in the number of the *Revue des deux Mondes* for July 15, under the title "Les Garanties de nos Libertés," how perilous for the liberty of every citizen is the abuse of Art. 10 of the Code of Criminal Examination, made by the prefects and police officers, on the order of the Minister of the Interior, for the application of the congregation acts. Let us quote a few lines from this paper :

We are right in declaring that never did public authority act more roughly than during the last year ; that the last bills have been suggested and enforced by a sectarian spirit ; that, owing to pettifogging, the parliamentary proceedings, instead of protecting free discussion, have been used to crush it ; that Parliament, converted into a court of justice, has denied the right of employing advocates to those who have been condemned in advance by the majority ; that the laws, voted with a culpable thoughtlessness, contain tricks ; that the government, after securing from both houses of Parliament violent laws, went beyond their plain intent in executing them, and thus broke them. Wherefore public authority, the task of which should be to foster peace, fails of its mission and brings disturbance and war into the streets.

Altogether, with Georges Picot, Gabriel Monod, the learned editor of the *Revue historique*, who so gallantly fought for justice in the Dreyfus case ; René Goblet, an ex-premier and former leader of the Radical party ; Cornély in *Le Siècle*, and, with less vigor, Georges Clémenceau, the present editor of *L'Aurore*, have protested against these excesses. They clearly understand that the civil power has nothing to gain from the proceedings of the majority ; they reflect that a majority which abuses its power is condemned to become sooner or later an oppressed minority ; and they claim for their adversaries the rights which they demanded for themselves, though only yesterday those rights were denied to them by their adversaries.

Among this gallant, but as yet too small, troop of Liberals, we are proud to say, the Protestants hold a prominent place. Their attitude in the present conflict shows that French Protestantism, on the whole, is a party of free inquiry, of toleration,



and of liberty. They condemn the vexations inflicted upon the Roman Catholics for the same reason that they condemn the persecutions which they had to suffer in former days. They do not deem that religious politics should be a perpetual crimination and recrimination, and have resolved with all true Liberals to promote religious peace.<sup>3</sup>

As for the Parisian Jews, the great majority of the so-called neo-Israelites are unbelievers, and interested only in business or art; but a minority, of which the Reinachs, Alphandéry, and Henry Michel are the prominent men, stand for the spirit of the prophets and for full liberty of conscience. On this matter there is no doubt that the liberal Jews are supported by the bulk of the orthodox or talmudic Jews, represented by the Rothschilds.

Such is, in its great features, the religious situation in Paris at the end of the parliamentary session. Let us now sum it up in a few lines. The repression of the encroachments of the Roman Catholic clergy was unavoidable, because of the excessive increase of their wealth and their participation in political matters; but, as often happens in such reactions, it has not seldom been too rough and hasty. The problem of the monastic congregations ought to have been solved slowly, as has been the question of the schools, which has lasted for seventeen years and is not yet settled. In acting so roughly and without observing the ordinary proceedings of Parliament, the Combes cabinet has brought on an excitement which is perilous, not only for the country, but also for itself. If, at the reopening of Parliament in the middle of October, the cabinet should commit one mistake more, it might not be supported by the majority and would fall.<sup>4</sup> Then it would rest upon the new majority, after having broken every link with the ultra-socialist and anti-religious groups, to resume the noble tradition of the liberal republicans, to find an equitable way of reconciling religious liberty with law, and to settle the question of the separation of church and state.

<sup>3</sup>See *Le Temps*, July 13, 1903.

<sup>4</sup>In fact, the situation has not materially changed, November, 1903. A. G. B.